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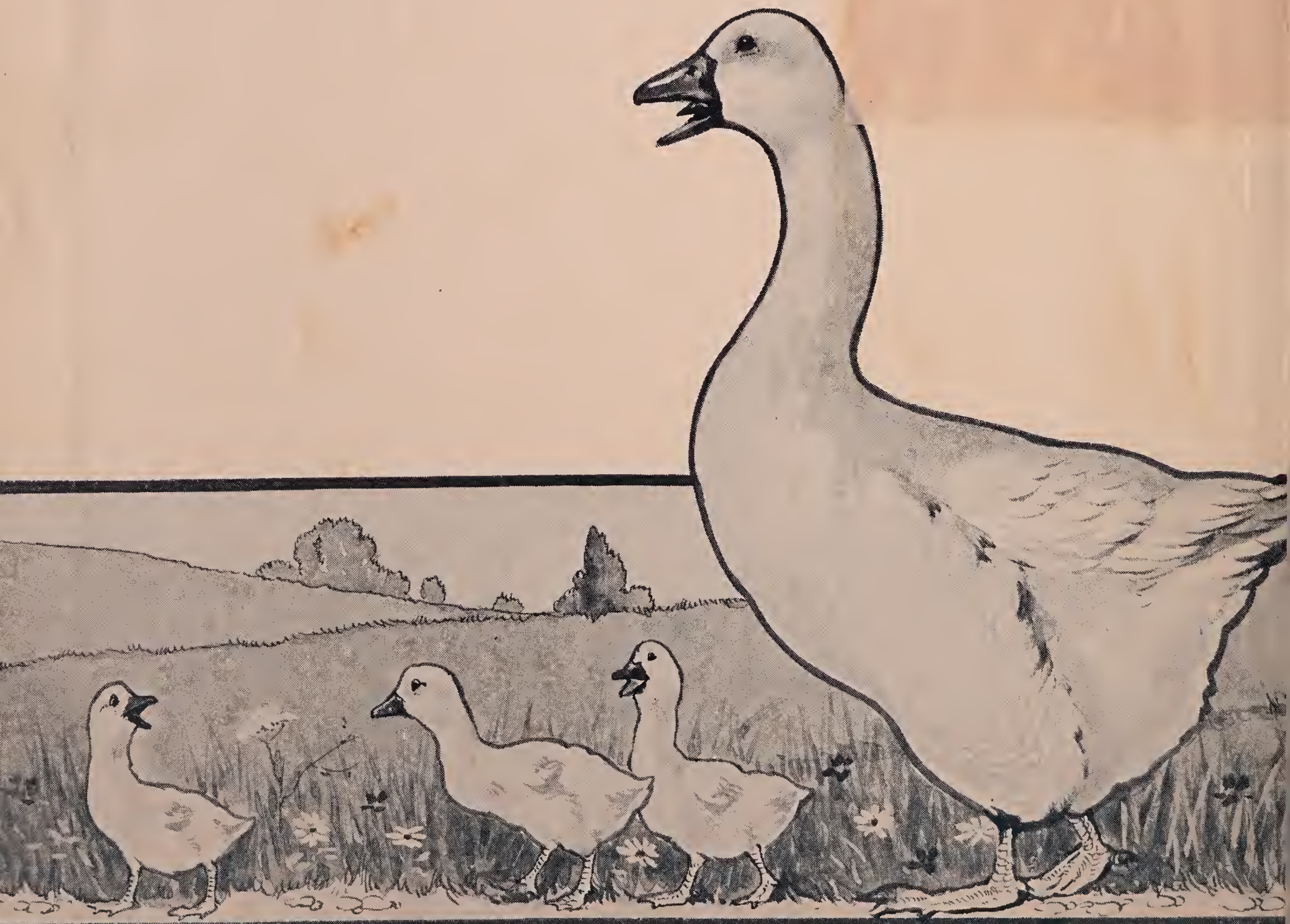
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YELLOW BILL'S ADVENTURE



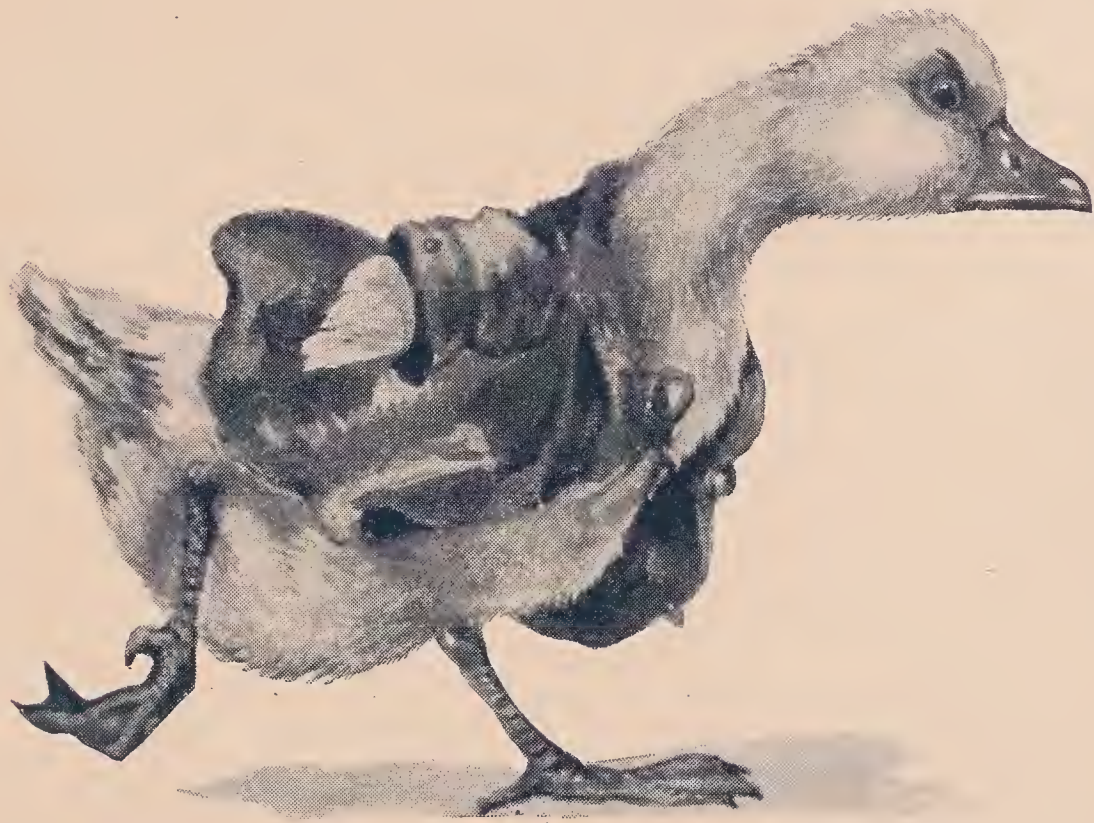


THIS BOOK
BELONGS TO





✓ YELLOW BILL'S ADVENTURE ✓



✓ BY
DOLORES McKENNA ✓

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VERY, very early, one morning, so early that even the old rooster—that alarm clock of the barn-yard—was still asleep, a little yellow gosling stepped out of the hen-yard and looked cautiously around.



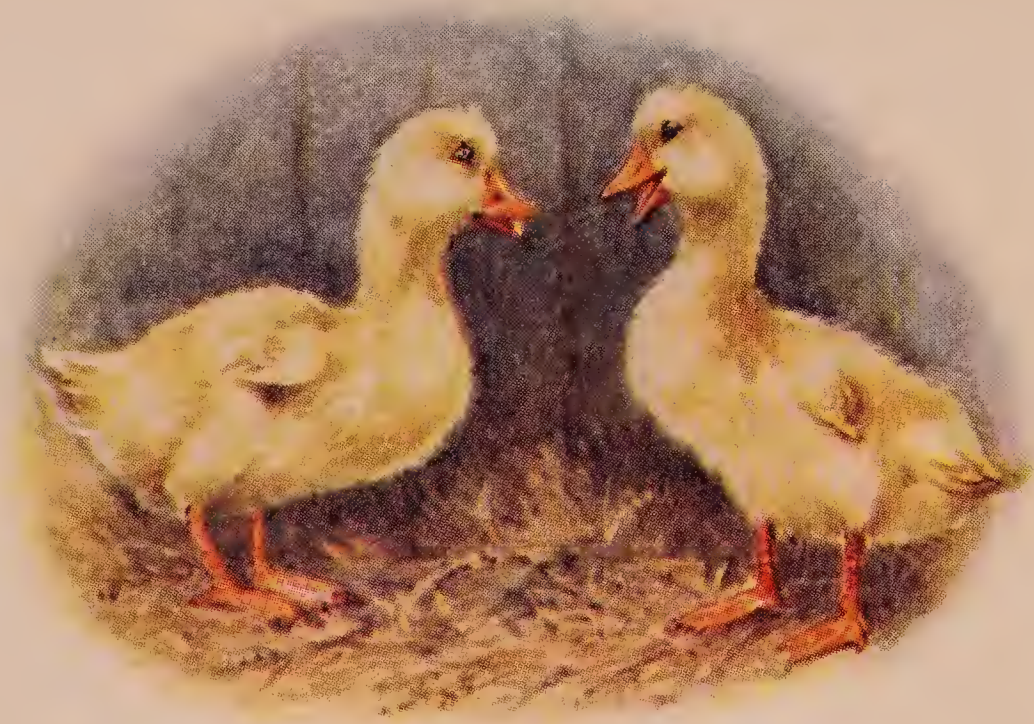
Nobody saw her but the old man-in-the-moon, and he never tells. Did you ever stop to think what a lot of secrets that old man knows and how carefully he guards them, not telling them to a single person?

Well, as I said before, no-one but the old man-in-the-moon saw this little yellow gosling. She had made up her mind to run away.

It was not exactly because she wanted to, but when she was picking up crumbs around the kitchen door-yard the day before, she heard the farmer's wife telling a neighbor that she expected company and thought she would have young gosling for dinner.



Little Yellow-Bill ran home breathless to her brothers and sisters and told them the terrible news, but they did not pay the slightest attention to her. In fact an old goose that stood nearby said, "That's what comes of playing around door-yards. Listeners hear no good of themselves," and she went off cackling to herself about silly young geese.



That night when they went to bed, little Yellow-Bill whispered her plan to her sister and tried to persuade her to go too, and after quite a little coaxing managed to get her to say she would. But when the time came to start she was too sleepy and when Yellow-Bill tried to arouse her she only pushed



her away and went off to sleep again.

“Well, I’ve done all I can,” said Yellow-Bill, “and I suppose I’ll have to go by myself, but they need not blame me, for I tried hard to warn them.”



So off on a world's journey she started alone, a little lunch she had saved from supper tucked under her wing. "My, but everything is still," she thought, as she crept quietly out of the yard.

To get to the main road she had to go right past the farmer's house, and this seemed quite risky. Just as she thought she was safely by, Shep, the farmer's dog, who was tied nearby, jumped up and started to bark loudly.

This frightened poor little Yellow-Bill so that she almost gave up the idea of running away. She sat still in the grass for a long time, and then, as nothing else happened, her courage came back, and picking up her lunch she started off down the road.

She felt a little lonely at first, everything was so new and strange to her. This was her first journey and she was not just sure where she was going; but then anything was better than being eaten by company.



With this thought in mind she became happier and hummed a little tune as she waddled along.

Pretty soon pink streaks began to appear in the sky and Yellow-Bill knew that the sun was ready to get up, and soon the top of his beautiful head would show just above the fluffy coverlet of clouds.



Little Yellow-Bill often used to wish, as she watched the sun get up in the morning, that she had such nice fluffy coverlets on her bed.

“Now I suppose they are all astir in the barn-yard,” she thought, as she watched the sun again. “I wonder if they have missed me yet?”, and the big tears came into her eyes, for you know, after all she was only a baby, a wee little gosling-baby.

“But anyhow,” she sighed, “they would miss me more tomorrow if the farmer’s wife has company, and then it would be worse than this for they would know I never could come back. As it is, some day I’ll come back when I’m a big goose and bring my beautiful young goslings with me. But we won’t come back to stay, only just to visit, for the farmer’s wife might again decide to have company.”

By this time the sun was up and the big trucks on their way to market kept rumbling past until poor little Yellow-Bill was quite nervous trying to keep out of their way.

Finally she came to a sign-post, one side reading, “FOX MEADOW 4 MILES,” and the other, “DIVIDING CREEK 3 MILES.”





After a little while she was able to make it out by spelling very slowly.

“Let me see,” she said, half out loud, “Fox Meadow! The meadow part sounds fine, but about the FOX—I don’t think it would be quite safe. Maybe I’d better go the Dividing Creek way. There may be a fox there, but the sign does not say so,” and so she turned and started down the new road.

She found it very pleasant as there was a nice cool shady



path through the woods. This she followed, feeling quite content, nibbling at little bits of grass, getting her breakfast as she went. All the time, however, she held fast to the little lunch she had brought, thinking that perhaps later on she might be hungry and food scarce.



“Oh dear,” she cried, “What’s that?”, as a rabbit darted up out of the grass in front of her, “I should think that he would at least say ‘excuse me.’ I’ve had so many scares this morning my nerves are all unstrung. I think I’ll just sit here in this mossy little spot and rest. I’m all twitchy,” and she sat down and fell fast asleep.

How long she slept little Yellow-Bill did not know, but presently she awoke to find a big furry creature that looked like Shep, the farmer’s dog, standing over her. He was so near that she could feel his hot breath on her face and she was so frightened she had to swallow hard to keep her poor little heart from jumping right out of her mouth.



Just as she thought that this terrible monster was about to eat her up, he grinned and said, "Don't look so frightened, little one. Nobody is going to hurt you; at least not while I'm around, and I mean to look after you very carefully from now on. How does it come that such a young creature as you is traveling alone? Or, perhaps you are not traveling. Maybe you are lost. Where is the rest of your family?"

He was so big and strange-looking, and asked so many questions that poor little Yellow-Bill became all confused.



“No sir,” she said, “I’m not lost,—not exactly—I runned away—and my family is home eaten by company,—and—and—” at that she burst into tears.

“Well! Well,” said the big creature, “That’s too bad now—eaten by company. What a dreadful thing that must be. Suppose you just walk along with me and tell me your story. I’m sure you must be rested by this time.”



“Yes, I’m quite rested now,” said little Yellow-Bill, “but I think I had better not go along with you as my mother always taught me not to trust strange persons, and I don’t know who you are. You might be old Bushy Fox for all I know and when I was least expecting it you might eat me for dinner.”

“Oh no, dear little one. I’m not Bushy. I know he has a very bad reputation, and he well deserves it, eating all the young chickens, ducks and geese he can find. No! No! I’m not Bushy and I’m sorry to say he is a relation of mine. I’m ‘Reddy,’ and a gentle person who bothers no one.”



“I have a very cosy little home back in the wood, and if you come along I’ll show it to you. Perhaps you would like to be my housekeeper. I’m without one just now.”

“He seems very pleasant,” thought little Yellow-Bill, “I don’t believe all foxes are bad. At least I’m sure this one is not,” and she got up and stretched herself, flapped her wings, and was ready to walk along with her newly-found friend.

“I’m so glad that I came along when I did,” said Reddy, “there are so many disagreeable creatures prowling around the woods, you might have had a shock from which you would



have found it hard to recover. Now, as I was saying,—my housekeeper, Molly Cottontail has suddenly disappeared; just where she went nobody seems to know. She was a very good little housekeeper, plump and clean, but she had no brains. Now you will be just the right person, for you have brains.”

Poor little Yellow-Bill! This was just the thing she lacked or she would never have been fooled and puffed up with pride by the nice speeches of this sly old fox.

“And now,” continued the old fellow, “tell me all about yourself and why you ran away.”



With all confidence, little Yellow-Bill told Reddy her story, and he sympathized with her, telling her what a cruel old creature the farmer's wife was, and how much more pleasant it would be for her in his nice comfortable home.



By the time she had finished her story they had reached Reddy's home. The entrance was in a pile of rocks, carefully hidden by a lot of bushes.

Reddy looked around to see that there were no strangers in sight, then said, "My dear, you see I must take care of you. You are such a little mite. When you grow up and are nice and plump—my, but you will be a joy to me."

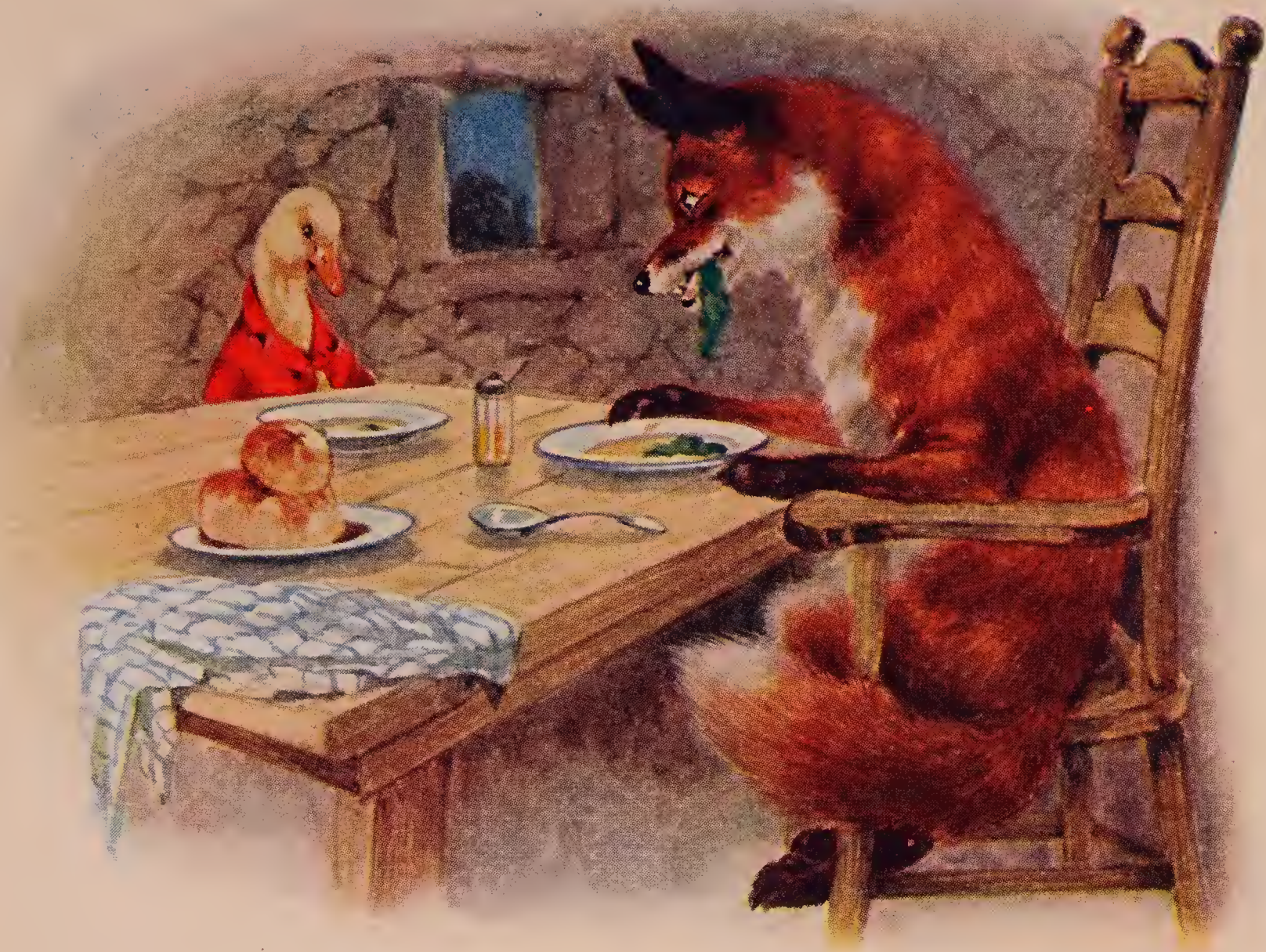
This last speech took away all fear that might have been in Yellow-Bill's foolish little head, and she walked right in.

It was dark and scary inside, and little Yellow-Bill could not see a bit at first. Then, after a while, her eyes became accustomed to it.

“Sit down and make yourself comfortable while I get some supper” said Reddy, “I’ll open this window and let in some air and light,” and he pushed aside a stone in the wall.



Yellow-Bill was quite disappointed, as Reddy’s house was not nearly as nice as she had supposed it would be. It was a dirty, untidy place. She looked around and then said to herself, “Well, it’s just like a man’s housekeeping. Tomorrow I’ll just get at it and clean it up good. Then we will live very nicely.”



“Supper is ready,” said Reddy, and he set on the table some new cabbage leaves, corn and herbs.

They ate silently, Reddy grabbing his food and seeming to put more in his mouth at one time than it would hold, and making queer noises as he ate.

“I’ll have to teach him table-manners,” thought little Yellow-Bill, “but I don’t mind, anything is better than being eaten by company.”

After supper Reddy cleared the things away, and when Yellow-Bill offered to help him he refused, saying, “No, thank you, not to-night, you are too tired. To-morrow you can begin as my housekeeper. And, if you don’t mind, I’ll just take a stroll out in the moonlight, smoke my pipe, and see what is going on. You need not wait up for me, but go to bed any time you please.”

When he had closed the door after him and Yellow-Bill heard him bar it, she began to feel afraid, and wondered if after all she had better stay. And then thinking of her mother and sisters and brothers in the nice sociable barn-yard, she began to cry, and when Reddy Fox came in that night and went over to see if she were there, he saw tears on her little cheeks.



“Well!”, he said to himself with an ugly chuckle, “I see where I have to be extra nice to ‘little foolish-head’ if I want a nice big fat goose for my dinner sometime. She may decide to go back home and be eaten by company, and I would then have to eat young gosling, though I much prefer goose—a big one,—and maybe a lot of goslings too.”



Next morning little Yellow-Bill was awake very early. She decided, as she waited for Reddy to awaken, that she would tell him she thought she would go back to the farm as she was so lonely.

Pretty soon he stirred and got up. "Hello, little Yellow-Bill, did you sleep well last night?" he asked.

"Yes," said Yellow-Bill, "but I was so lonely, I just cried until I fell asleep."

"Did you?" said Reddy, "Well, Well! that is too bad. Suppose we have our breakfast outside this morning, and then we will see what amusement we can find today," and opening the door he let in a flood of sunlight. "There now, don't you feel better?" he asked.

“Yes, I do,” said the little gosling, “but I think I’ll start back home after breakfast for I’m sure my mother will miss me.”

“What about being eaten by company?” said Reddy in his sly way.

To this Yellow-Bill made no reply. She did not know what to say.

“I’ll tell you,” said Reddy, “after breakfast we will take a walk. I know a fine pond where we can both take a swim. Then if you still want to go home I’ll see what I can do; and if you think you wish to stay longer and will tell me just how to go to the barn-yard, I’ll take a message to your mother. How does that sound?”





“Well, I’ll try it,” said Yellow-Bill, “for at least another day.”

And so, after they had breakfast, had taken a walk and a swim, Yellow-Bill, little thinking of what might happen, gave Reddy full directions how to get to the barn-yard with a message to her mother, and he started off on a trot, with a wide grin on his face when he thought of what he would do every time he visited her home.

“It’s very good of him!”, said Yellow-Bill, “I’ll surprise him when he gets back by having the house all cleaned up, and a good supper waiting.”



So all day she was as busy as could be, and she was quite tired when, with supper ready, she sat down to wait for Reddy to return.



When he did come Yellow-Bill was quite disappointed because he said he did not want any supper.

“I’m so tired after that long walk to the barn-yard,” he said lying down. “It took my appetite away.”

Yellow-Bill then ate her supper alone, and in silence they were soon off to bed, long before the moon came up to peep in the window or the little stars twinkled and nodded to each other.

Next morning Reddy did not have much to say to Yellow-Bill as she bustled around getting breakfast. Even foxes are ashamed sometimes of the naughty things they do, and after breakfast he took his pipe and newspaper and pretended to read, every once in a while glaring up at Yellow-Bill as she put the breakfast things away, made up the beds, and straightened things generally.

Yellow-Bill, as she glanced at him, thought in her foolish way that he was mighty fine and handsome.

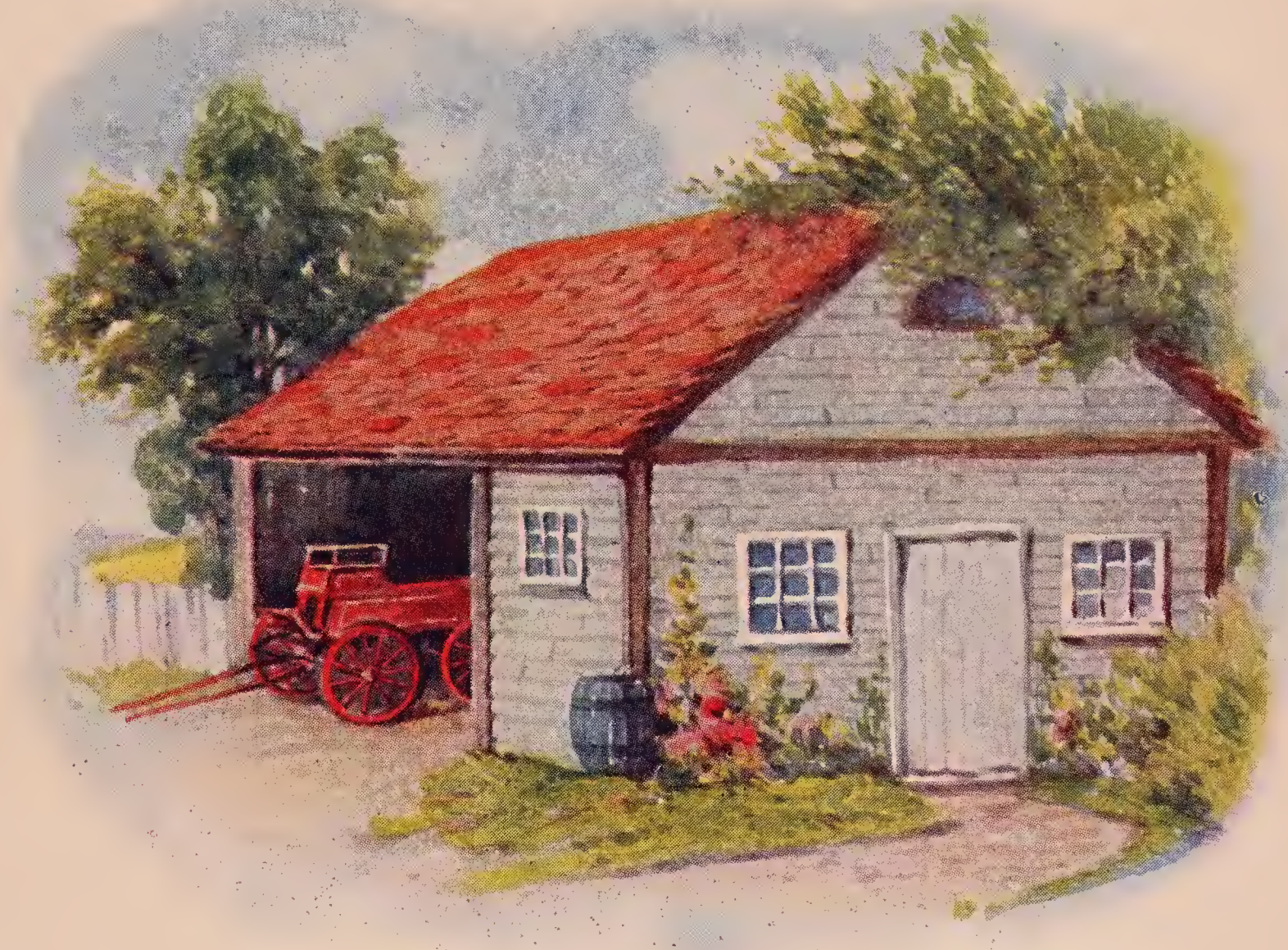


They lived this way for a long time, Reddy going and coming as he pleased, very often to the barn-yard, from which place he returned with accounts of how fast the goslings were disappearing, making Yellow-Bill feel that she was lucky to have left.



Always, though, when he returned he wanted no supper, and she wondered at this, but decided that it must be the long walk that tired him so that he could not eat.

One morning at breakfast Reddy slyly remarked how fond he was of nice fresh eggs.



Now this was just the needed suggestion, for Yellow-Bill, not little Yellow-Bill now, for she had grown to be a fine big goose, had found a shed nearby in which were quantities of all kinds of feathers, and here she had been secretly laying eggs, on which she intended to set when she had enough.

That evening when Reddy came home to supper he was surprised to find two nice fresh eggs there for him.

“Well! Well!”, said he, smacking his lips, “How I love fresh eggs! Where did you get them?”



“I laid them myself,” said Yellow-Bill. “I have made a nice nest for myself in the wood-shed and there I will hatch my young goslings.”

“Just what I had hoped you would do,” said the Sandy gentleman, smacking his lips as he thought of the goslings. “Now I will take care that you have plenty to eat and drink, so you need not worry. Just take good care of your eggs.”

And Reddy did bring her plenty of corn and water, and with the exception of a little walk in the sunshine every day, Yellow-Bill never left her nest.



Then one morning a shell cracked and out came a little gosling; and before long all the eggs were cracked and the very proud Yellow-Bill was busy sheltering the wiggling little things, but she kept them all under her wings, so they would be nice and warm and would get strong.

That night when Reddy, looking very spick and span, looked in at Yellow-Bill, she was very proud to tell him of her splendid family.

Reddy rubbed his hands together and smiled such a knowing smile it quite pleased foolish Yellow-Bill, who thought Reddy was as pleased with her family as herself. He was, but not quite the same way.

“Well,” he said to himself, “I guess my time has come for a good feast. I’ll invite some of my friends in and show them that after all I was not such a fool to keep that silly goose around so long. I’ll go over to farmer Grig’s garden in the morning and get some onions. Plenty of onions in the stuffing.”

“Plenty of onions in the stuffing,” he repeated to himself, as he got his supper ready.





Early next morning he went off to the farm to get some herbs and seasoning before anyone was around. He well knew that he was not very safe if farmer Grigs should see him, and he gathered all he needed as quickly as possible.



Once out of sight he did not hurry. "I'll take my time this morning as I will have a busy day to-morrow getting the old goose ready. I'll let the goslings grow a little before I eat them."

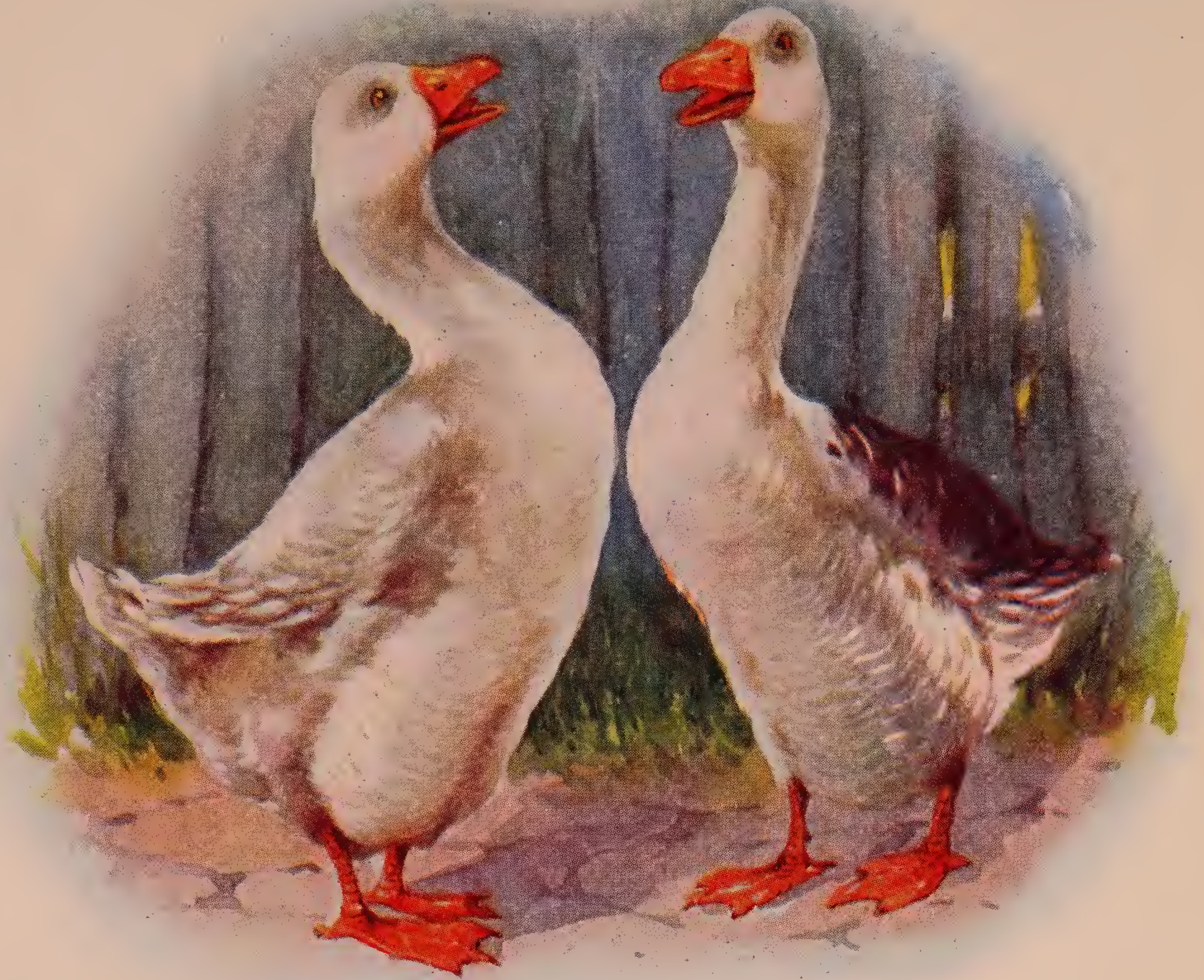
Thus he mused to himself as he walked along, never dreaming that anything might happen to upset his plans, but one never can tell. There is a saying, "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched," and that is exactly what Reddy was doing.

Yellow-Bill had remained at home so willingly all the while she was with him that Reddy never dreamed that she would not always stay right there. But he had not counted on her pride.



As soon as the sun was up that morning, Yellow-Bill took her wonderful goslings and started off to visit her cousin, Lady Anne, who lived in a very select neighborhood not far away.

“My, but she will be surprised to see my fine family,” she thought, and she stopped at Reddy’s door to tell him where she was going. Much to her disappointment she found that he was not at home. At first she was going to wait until he returned, but thinking it might be late, and being so anxious to show off her family, she decided to go on.



She was quite tired out when she reached her cousin, the goslings being so interested in everything that she had quite a hard time keeping track of them.

As she had expected, her cousin was very much surprised and interested in her family; but when Yellow-Bill told her where she had been living she flapped her wings and gave great shrieks.



“You are not going back to him,” she cried, “he is the worst old rascal in the country. That is why our master has put all this heavy wire around. Reddy came here every night and carried off either a chicken, a duck, or a goose. He had better not show himself around here again as there are traps and guns waiting for him.”

“I think you must be mistaken,” said Yellow-Bill, and she told her cousin how she had met him and about her life since, ending up with, “And when he saw my fine family last night, he was delighted and said that it was just what he had hoped I would do.”



“That’s just it,” said her cousin, “and when you are as old as I am, and have hatched as many young goslings, and had as much experience in losing them, maybe you will not be so trusting. Certainly he hoped you would do it, and then he could have many meals. He would have eaten you long ago only if he ate you he would only have one meal, while if he waited, he knew he would have many. And as to taking messages to your mother, I suppose he has eaten her and every one of your brothers and sisters too, unless your master has fixed the place so that he could not get in.”

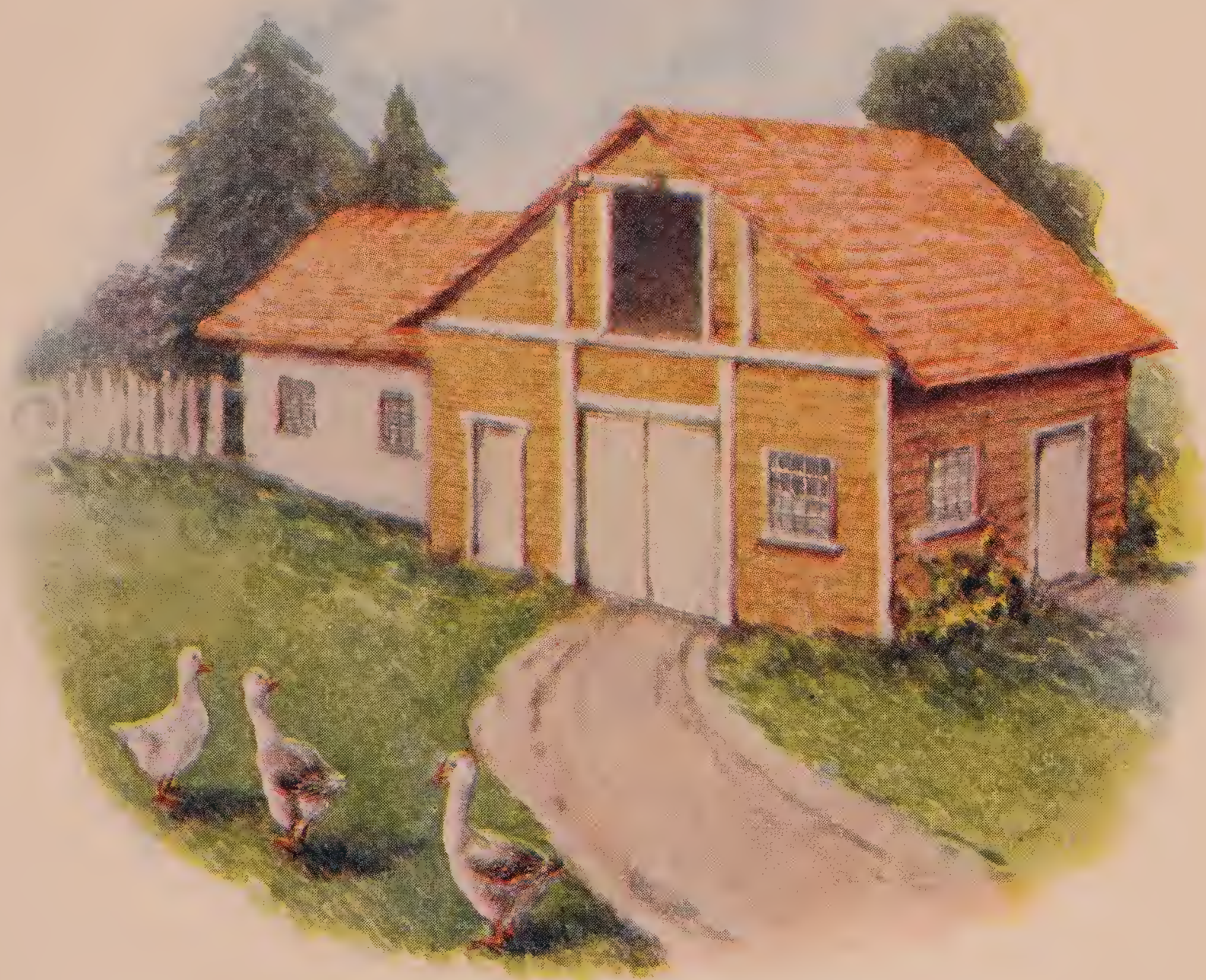


Poor little Yellow-Bill then remembered that Reddy had never been able to eat any supper on his return from his many trips to her old home on the farm.

“Oh dear! Oh dear!—My poor children! Whatever shall I do?” she cried.

“Do?” shrieked her cousin, “you silly creature, don’t go back!”

“But I have no place to go; and the shed was so comfortable,—and I had the nicest feather bed.”



“Ugh!”, said Lady Anne, “and I don’t suppose you ever stopped to think how he got so many feathers. Now if you care to you may stay here. Luckily you are of the same breed as the rest of us and I’m sure the farmer will be glad to have you. You see, he sends all our eggs to market and sells them. And another thing, this is one place that Reddy never bothers. He is too wise. So you can feel sure that he will not come after you.”



So Yellow-Bill and her family made their home in the farm-yard with her cousin.

That night when the farmer came out to feed the poultry he was quite surprised to find a new goose and nine beautiful goslings.



“It beats me!”, he said, scratching his head, “I can’t see where that old goose and the little goslings came from. I didn’t know that anyone around here had the same kind that I keep. However, I’ll not turn them out, for if they have strayed away, old Reddy would only be too anxious to look after them,” and he closed and locked the gate for the night.

And now we’ll leave Yellow-Bill and her family, happy and free from harm, and go back to old Reddy.



When he came back from his morning walk, he went straight to the wood-shed and was very much surprised to find it empty. It did not trouble him much at first for he could not believe that Yellow-Bill would go away. He thought that perhaps she had taken her family down to the river, and he sat down to read his newspaper and wait.

When late afternoon came and they did not return, Reddy began to get hungry and cross. "When she comes," he grumbled, "I'll teach her a lesson about going away that she won't forget." Finally he ate his supper of some food he had in the larder and then went off prowling.



“She could not have gone very far,” he muttered, as he walked along, “I’ll bet she has gone over to that fancy poultry-farm across the river. I know they are on the lookout for me over there,—at least they were for a long time,—but I’ll just take a look around there tonight. I have not called in such a long time they may not be expecting me. And if I just once get hold of that ungrateful goose and her family—” and a wicked smile came over his face as he thought of what he would do when he had them safe in the shed once more.



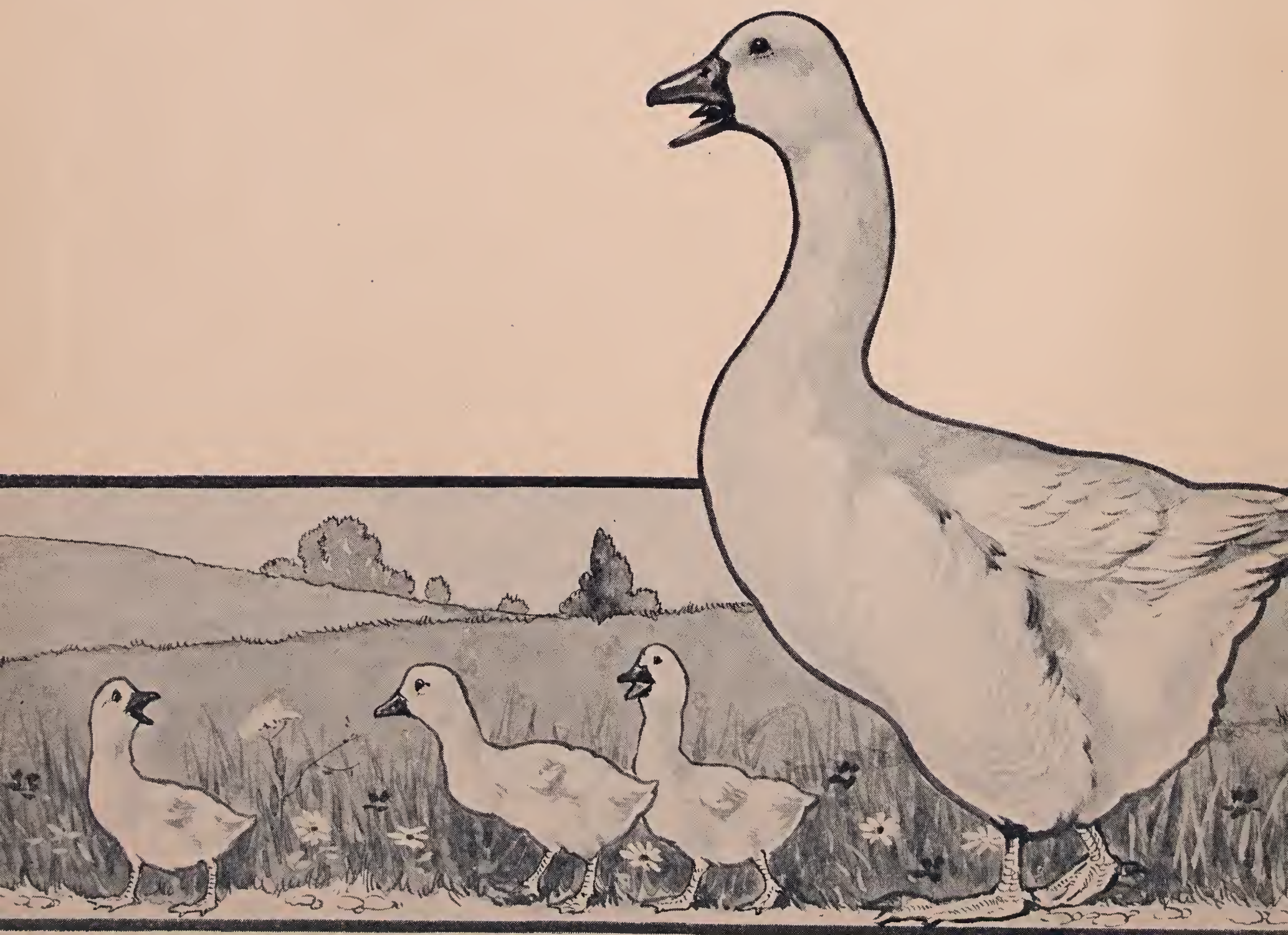
But the farmer had never let up watching, and that night when Reddy went prowling to find Yellow-Bill and her family he discovered this, for just as he was about to crawl in under the fence, something suddenly snapped, and Reddy found himself held fast. He tried in every way to free himself but could not. Finally he became exhausted and lay very still until the farmer found him next morning.



“Ha! Ha! My fine fellow,” said the farmer when he saw him, “you will go prowling in other people’s yards, will you?”, and he took him, trap and all off to the wood-shed.

What happened there I don’t know, but one day soon after that, when Yellow-Bill and her family were walking out that way, she saw what looked to her like a very familiar fox-skin nailed on the wood-shed door.

THE END





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